

4.3 Senator S.C. Ferguson of the Chief Minister regarding changes which had been made to the structure or workings of the Economics Unit: [1(330)]

Will the Chief Minister explain whether any changes have been made to the structure or workings of the Economics Unit, or whether any such changes are being considered?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

There has been a temporary change to the working arrangements of the Economics Unit as the Chief Economic Adviser is working remotely from the U.K. (United Kingdom) on a contract basis following his decision to return to the U.K. for family reasons. He fulfils his responsibilities through email, telephone, videoconferencing and attending in person when necessary. This arrangement will remain in place until a replacement is recruited.

4.3.1 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Is this not rather sudden? Why is the Economic Adviser working for the States in Scotland? What project is he working on and is there any connection with any of the sort of various things that have been going on with the Council of Ministers?

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am not sure that last phrase in the question is rather too wide with anything “going on”. You have to be more specific than that, Senator.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

With the reports that have been issued by the ... no, I think we will leave that one and come back to it.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Are you withdrawing the entire supplementary question?

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

No, just the last phrase.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I said in my opening response that the Chief Economic Adviser has moved to the United Kingdom; yes, that happens to be Scotland, that is where he has family, and he has moved there for family reasons and he moved in a timely manner to coincide with the start of the summer term. So he has been there since the Easter holidays; I think that is correct. But he is working on contract. That does not add extra cost to the States, while we now undertake a recruitment for a replacement.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Supplementary.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Just a moment, Senator. If there are no other questions then you have your final supplementary.

4.3.2 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Family reasons always seems to cover a whole multitude of sins but can include family reasons. Given that it seems to have taken place at Easter why has there not been any announcement, bearing in mind it is the Island’s Chief Economic Adviser?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Because he is still employed and he is still providing economic advice; just remotely because of family reasons.

4.3.3 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I am sorry, the Chief Minister has just said he is retiring or ending his position at some point and normally on these things, there is normally a notification publicly that says: "The Chief Economic Adviser has declared his retirement" or resignation or whatever and there is a timeframe and that he will be leaving on such and such a point. There are measures in place for recruitment and all that type of thing. We have heard nothing. The first thing I heard about this was from this question.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Chief Economic Adviser is still employed by the States, still doing work. If the Deputy felt that we should have made public the change from Jersey to Scotland then I can only apologise for that.

4.3.4 Deputy J.A. Hilton of St. Helier:

Is there not a Deputy Chief Economic Adviser? I am just really surprised to hear this news this morning that the Economic Adviser has moved to Scotland and is working there. With the best will in the world I cannot see how that is going to continue to be of benefit to States Members and the Island as a whole. So how long is he going to be employed while he is resident in Scotland?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The start of the search for a replacement has already started. There is another economist in the Economics Unit who was promoted earlier this year to senior economist and is doing excellent work. The Chief Economic Adviser is still available via telephone, videoconferencing and, from time to time, in person. It does not interfere with any of his work at all in this regard. Economists, most of their work is research, is writing reports and is giving written advice. That can be done remotely and because of the shortness of the notice that the Economic Adviser wished to give in order to move his family, as I have said for schooling purposes, it was felt best to continue his employment for a period of time while we could undertake a recruitment process.

4.3.5 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Has the Chief Minister any idea how long that period of time will be?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It is my understanding - we are in the second quarter now - that date comes to an end during the third quarter.

4.3.6 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

The Chief Minister referred to a shortness of notice. The reason I am puzzled is that I always understood in senior positions that you could not give short notice on these type of things for the very reason we wanted to make sure we had a good handover period and things like that. What has happened there? Is this a change in policy or something they have overlooked?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Absolutely not. Somebody continuing their employment from elsewhere allows exactly that. Would it not be unreasonable as an employer for somebody who wants to ... they have made their decision that they want to go for purposes of schooling.

[10:15]

I would have expected the Deputy to be understanding about an individual's family circumstances and the need to find places in schools at the start of term rather than mid-term, so we were being a reasonable employer.; the Chief Economic Adviser continues his excellent work remotely, and that is what he is doing while we now seek to recruit a replacement.

4.3.7 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Previous Economic Advisers found they needed frequent contact with businesses in Jersey. We have all seen Mr. Powell running round town so that he can visit people. If our current Economic Adviser moved at Easter when did recruitment start and why is it not well underway now? We should be interviewing by now.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It is underway; I do not have the detailed timeline in front of me. Perhaps I can give the Senator some reassurance that that previous Economic Adviser is still running around town speaking to businesses on behalf of Government and helping with policy formation as well.